

MEDLEY

- a potpourri of diverse talent

January 2021

Vision Statement

To create a diverse workforce and promote a positive work environment where all employees are respected and valued for their contributions.

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service

Submitted by: Christopher Sacchetti



“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort or convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others. In dangerous valleys and hazardous pathways, he will lift some bruised and beaten brother to a higher and more noble life.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is a pivotal leader of the Civil Rights movement and a preeminent leader of the Civil Rights movement. He is the only non-president to have a national holiday dedicated in his honor and is the only non-president memorialized on the National Mall in the nation’s capital. Throughout his lifetime, Dr. King strived to realize the dream of communities united by inclusion. Each year, on the third Monday in January, Americans answer Martin Luther King Jr.’s call to action by serving their neighborhoods and volunteering their time and effort in order to make a difference and evoke change.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister and a leader of the Civil Rights movement in the United States from December 1955 until his assassination on April 4, 1968. In 1955, King was recruited to serve as spokesman for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a campaign by the African-American population of Montgomery, Alabama to bring integration of the city’s bus lines. In 1957, Dr. King was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). THE SCLC was designed to provide leadership for the civil rights movement. In 1963, Dr. King, along with fellow SCLC leader Ralph Abernathy, set up headquarters in Birmingham, Alabama. The two men began recruiting volunteers for rallies and gave workshops in nonviolent techniques. The Birmingham Campaign was a strategic effort to promote civil rights for African-Americans. Dr. King and others involved in organizing the Birmingham campaign were arrested for violating the injunction prohibiting public civil rights demonstrations. It was during the Birmingham campaign that Dr. King drafted the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” which included his philosophy and tactics.

Later in 1963, Dr. King was one of the driving forces behind the “March for Jobs and Freedom”, also known as the “March on Washington”. During the “March on Washington”: Over a quarter million people marched to the National Mall. In 1964, at 35 years old, Martin Luther King, Jr. became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize. That same year, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, eliminating legalized racial segregation in the United States. The legislation made it illegal to discriminate against African-Americans or other minorities in hiring, public accommodations, education or transportation, areas which at the time were still very segregated in many places. In 1965, the United States Congress passed the “Voting Rights Act”, which eliminated the remaining barriers to voting for African Americans.

Dr. King advocated nonviolent resistance to achieve social justice and racial equality. Through powerful oration, he used his words as a call to action through organizing boycotts, protests, and sit-ins. Inspired by his Christian faith and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King led multiple nonviolent movements in the late 1950s and throughout most of the 1960s to achieve legal equality for African-Americans within the United States. Dr. King went on to lead campaigns against international conflict and poverty, always maintaining adherence to his principle that men and women everywhere, regardless of color or creed, were members of the human family.

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Dr. King was arrested 30 times for his participation in civil rights activities. Between 1965 and 1968, Dr. King shifted his focus on economic justice. His work, during these years, culminated in the “Poor People’s Campaign”. His less than thirteen years of nonviolent leadership ended when he was shot and killed by James Earl Ray at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968.

The United States Congress passed a bill designating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday as a national holiday starting in 1986. On August 23, 1994, Congress passed the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday and Service Act designating Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: “What are you doing for others?” The MLK Day of Service is a way to channel King’s life and teachings into community action.

Per the 2018 Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) report, 32,772,431 male volunteers contributed roughly 3 billion hours of service and 44,614,636 female volunteers contributed 3.9 billion hours of service. The combined volunteer service was valued at an estimated \$166.9 billion. According to CNCS, 22,631,756 Baby Boomer volunteers contributed nearly 2.2 billion hours of service while Generation X volunteers contributed about 1.8 billion hours of service. Generation X had the highest volunteer rate among age groups at 36.4 percent while Baby Boomers had the highest number of hours volunteered. Generation Y’s 26,361,226 volunteers contributed roughly 2 billion hours of service. The volunteer service was valued at an estimated \$48.1 billion. Millennial volunteering increased more than 6 percent since 2017.

Per the 2018 CNCS report, thirty percent of veterans volunteer. 5,632,731 veterans contributed approximately 630 million hours of voluntary service valued at an estimated 50 billion dollars. The volunteer rate rose to 30.3 percent in 2018 from 24.9 percent in 2016. The number of volunteers grew to 77.3 million from 62.6 million within a two-year span. New Hampshire, Virginia, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Washington had the highest number of veteran volunteers while Utah, Minnesota, Oregon, Iowa, and Alaska ranked as the states with the highest number of volunteers. MLK Day of Service brings us closer to the realization of King’s dream.



February is Black History Month

Submitted by: Christopher Sacchetti

“Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us.” (Wilma Rudolph, U.S. Track and Field)

The annual celebration of Black Americans’ achievements is credited to Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Woodson, also known as “The Father of Black History” dedicated his life and career to African-American history and advocated to bring national awareness to Black History Month. Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a month to recognize the central role that African-Americans have played in American history.

The struggles of African-Americans are at the heart of our human experience. Their triumphs over both racism and sexism are a testimonial to the human spirit. Henry Ossian Flipper, born into slavery on March 21, 1856, was appointed to the United States Military Academy in 1873. Over the next four years, he overcame harassment, isolation, and insults to become West Point’s first Africa-American graduate, and commissioned officer, in the regular U.S. Army. Flipper was first stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma and later served at Forts Davis, Elliot, and Quitman Texas. Flipper served as a signal officer and quartermaster, installed telegraph lines, and supervised the building of roads. At Fort Sill, Lieutenant Flipper directed the construction of a drainage system that helped to prevent the spread of malaria.

In 1881, while serving at Fort Davis, Flipper’s commanding officer accused him of embezzling money from commissary funds. A court-martial found him not guilty of embezzlement, but convicted him of conduct unbecoming an officer and ordered him dismissed from the Army. After his dishonorable discharge, Lieutenant Flipper fought to clear his name. In 1976, thirty-six years after his death, the United States Army reviews Flipper’s case and awarded him an honorable discharge dated June 30, 1882. President William Jefferson Clinton pardoned Flipper in 1999.

When World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, industrialized urban areas in the North, Midwest, and West faced a shortage of industrial laborers, as the war put an end to the steady tide of European immigration to the United States and millions went to serve in America’s Armed Forces. Between 1910-1930, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, and St. Louis witnessed African-American populations grow by forty percent while the number of African-Americans employed in industrial occupations doubled.

New York’s Harlem became a cultural center for poor and middle-class African-Americans. During the 1920s and 1930s, New York was one of the few states which outlawed school segregation. African-Americans moved from all over the country to receive an education there. The Harlem Renaissance began as a series of literary discussions in both Greenwich Village and Harlem and redefined the artistic expressions of African Americans in art, music, and writing.

At the core of this cultural renaissance were African-American females who shared their stories as artists, musicians, and authors. Marian Anderson began singing at Carnegie Hall as a soloist as a teenager. Anderson gave her first concert at New York’s Town Hall where she received poor reviews for her singing of a German folk song. Undeterred, Anderson traveled to Europe in order to improve her singing in foreign languages. Anderson was popular throughout Europe. However, in Salzburg, Austria, authorities refused to allow Marian Anderson

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the opportunity to sing based on race. While Anderson was eventually allowed to sing, she was not officially recognized as part of the overall festival. In 1939, Marian Anderson was denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). In protest, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR which brought Anderson top national prominence as a symbol of the struggle for racial equality.

Playwright and Civil Rights Activist Regina Anderson Andrews was the first Black Supervising Librarian in the New York Public Library (NYPL) system. Her accomplishment was not easy. Andrews fought the NYPL administration for equal opportunity for promotion and equal pay. In 1923, Andrews wrote "I'm American" on her application for a position at the New York Public Library when asked to identify her race. Andrews received a request to discuss her answer. She was asked a second time her racial designation. Again, she stated, "I'm American". She was then told, "You're not an American. You're not white."

Fannie Lou Hamer once said, "Never forget where we came from and always praise the bridges that carried us over." African-Americans continue to contribute to the United States of America through commitment to the arts, athletics, politics, sciences, technology, and defense of the United States.

Monarda Germplasm Activity in the Plant Introduction Research Unit, Ames, Iowa

Submitted by: Jeffrey Carstens

Dating back to 1898, the Section of Seed and Plant Introduction (today known as the US National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS)) was formed in order to acquire and distribute useful plant germplasm to farmers; this was critical to developing the young USA's agriculture capacity. This Section evolved into the establishment of Regional Plant Introduction Stations tasked with the preservation and distribution of plant genetic resources and the current 19 NPGS sites. The North Central Regional Plant Introduction Station (NCRPIS) at Ames, Iowa, was the first station established (1948). Today it holds nearly 55,000 samples such as maize, carrots, melons, spinach, basil, sunflower, quinoa and more recently many species of North American natives.

Why preservation of plant genetics? Over time, established plant germplasm is a result of natural selection (in nature) or of intentional selection of desirable genetics by humans. It is true that genetic diversity has been lost in nature (naturally), but largely as a result of human activity. No one fully understands how much genetic diversity has been lost over time, how it may have been distributed historically, or how it will change in the future. What we do know is that once genetics are lost, they're lost. Collecting seeds, depositing them in a seedbank, and maintaining them helps ensure safeguarding of diverse plant genetic resources.

How are plant genetic resources acquired? The majority of germplasm collections arise from plant explorations, through exchange with other gene banks, or specific arrangements between a curator and a collector. The act of collecting requires the knowledge of *what* (identification skills), *where* (gap analysis), and *when* (biological insight) in order to successfully sample viable, high quality seeds. *Most importantly, it requires the willingness of the collector to physically seek out plants in nature and be there to sample at the right time.* A quality comprehensive collection is comprised of samples that represent the breadth of a species' genetic diversity across its native range. Plants must adapt and specialize to survive in a range of habitats conditions, a process that occurs over time, which impacts their genetic makeup and, collectively, their genetic diversity. A gene bank curator usually has many geographic areas targeted for sample collection in order "fill collection gaps" in genetic diversity and habitat specialization.

Initial NPGS focus on economically important crops later expanded to include native plants and crop wild relatives providing important sources of useful genes and traits. One native "crop", the genus *Monarda*, the bee balms, is a group of herbaceous plants native to North America and Mexico represented by approximately 18 species. The collection of *Monarda* (164 accessions representing 14 species) is currently held at NCRPIS and is curated by Jeffrey D. Carstens. In the last couple of years, some rather interesting *Monarda* samples have been acquired, including newly described *Monarda luteola* (Singhurst and Holmes 2011) and *Monarda austroappalachiana* (Floden, A. 2015) and also the steno-endemic *Monarda brevis* (Weakley et al. 2017). To continue building upon the collection taxonomically, *Monarda* × *media* was recently acquired.

Why *Monarda*?

- A majority of *Monarda* species have proven to be excellent sources of essential oils useful as food/flavoring additives, antifungal and antimicrobial agents, fragrances, insect repellents, and antioxidants, as well as their use as a popular landscape plant.
- Bee balms are well-known pollinator "magnets" visited by a variety of insect species.
- Seeds of *Monarda* are orthodox in nature, meaning they are viable for a significant time in appropriate storage conditions, increasing their potential to be successfully preserved (Side Note: One of the oldest *Monarda* samples at NCRPIS is from 1960 and most recently (2018) tested 88% viable.)

In 2020, Warriors' Path State Park Ranger Marty Silver volunteered to help sample the rare *M. ×media* hybrid in eastern Tennessee. Despite Silver stating he was an "amateur botanist with limited taxonomic skills" and despite the COVID-19 pandemic, he made one of the most interesting collections of *Monarda* (Ames 35579) deposited in the NCRPIS repository. *M. ×media* is a recognized hybrid and its exact parentage is actually unknown (various potential hybrid combinations exist). Future research is needed to assign *M. ×media* to a specific hybrid combination, in addition to the naming of the other hybrid combinations. Despite being recognized (Willdenow 1809) almost 200 years ago, this hybrid had never been sampled for the NPGS. Why? While rarity is the biggest factor, correct identification of this taxa requires visual confirmation while in bloom. Being rare and flowering for only a limited time requires significant time and effort, and frequent visits in order to discover these hybrids. Without Silver's efforts, this collection would likely have never materialized. His reconnaissance and collection efforts are another step towards building a comprehensive collection; as several years and extensive research is needed to assemble a truly diverse *Monarda* collection. While there are so many species covering expansive geographic areas just waiting to be preserved, these collaborations and connections are absolutely vital in order to make gains in the race against time.

Dr. Lisa Ainsworth Elected to The National Academy of Sciences

Submitted by: Christopher Sacchetti



Dr. Lisa Ainsworth, a research plant physiologist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, an affiliate professor of plant biology and crop sciences at the University of Illinois, and a leader of the USDA-ARS Global Change and Photosynthesis Research Unit, was elected to the prestigious National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

Ainsworth, who leads both Soybean Free Air Concentration Enrichment (SoyFACE), a cutting-edge research facility where scientists can explore the current and future impact of the climate crisis on crops that are grown outdoors in real-world field conditions, and Realizing Increased Photosynthetic Efficiency (RIPE), an international research effort to ensure food security by improving photosynthesis, attributed her selection to the NAS to the “generous mentors and collaborators, creative post-docs and students, and the incredible research opportunities made possible by the USDA-ARS and the University of Illinois”. She was truly humbled and honored to be the recipient of this honor.

In addition to being elected to the NAS in 2020, Ainsworth is also the 2019 recipient of the National Academy of Sciences Prize in Food and Agricultural Sciences. She is the recipient of the Crop Science Society of America Presidential Award and a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Prior to joining USDA-ARS as a plant physiologist in 2004, she received her bachelor’s degree from the University of California, Los Angeles and earned her doctorate degree from the University of Illinois before spending a year as a Humboldt Fellow at the Juelich Research Center in Germany.

Dr. Ainsworth, renowned for her research of how crops are impacted by carbon dioxide and ozone, was honored with the NAS election because of her scientific achievements and original research. Ainsworth employs genomic, metabolomic, and biochemical tools to understand how plants will respond to climate change, particularly as atmospheric conditions are predicted to worsen. Her work has helped showcase how many factors, including pollutants, temperature, and rainfall, can influence the quality and productivity of corn, soybean, and other crops. Recognizing that ozone pollution has decreased U.S. corn and soybean harvests, Dr. Ainsworth has championed efforts to breed for ozone-tolerant crops.

The National Academy of Sciences is a private, nonprofit institution that was established under a congressional charter signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. The NAS recognizes achievement in science by election to membership and provides science, engineering, and health policy advice to the federal government and other organizations.

1890 Faculty Research Sabbatical Program (FRSP) Award

Submitted by: Christopher Sacchetti

The USDA-ARS will be funding Food Animal Environmental Systems Research Leader Dr. Karamat R. Sistani, of USDA-ARS Bowling Green Kentucky, and Kentucky State University’s College of Agriculture, Communities, and the Environment Assistant Professor of Soil Science Dr. Maheteme Gebremedhin’s proposal “Soil Health Assessment: Comparative studies of cover crop and biochar on soil organic carbon” through the 1890 Faculty Research Sabbatical Program.

Currently, faculty at 1890s institutions have a disproportionately low level of participation in the Food, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (FANRRS) workforce, especially as educators, scientists and extension staff. The collaborative research, proposed by Dr. Sistani and Dr. Gebremedhin, has several long-term benefits that, in many ways, are aligned with long-term workforce development agricultural initiatives. This 1890s Faculty Research Sabbatical Program (FRSP) is designed to allow scientists from the USDA-ARS and Kentucky State University (KSU), a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), to join forces and leverage existing infrastructure at both institutions that will support a well-coordinated program of experiments, measurements, and educational efforts.

The overall goals of Dr. Sistani’s and Dr. Gebremedhin’s work are to assess the impacts of tillage, cover crop, animal manure, and biochar amendments on SOC and selected physical, biological, and chemical soil properties. Specifically, for this study, Dr. Sistani and Dr. Gebremedhin will compare the long-term impacts of two tillage treatments (conventional and no-tillage) in conjunction with the use of biochar on soil organic matter (SOM) and other key soil attributes (bulk density, infiltration, water retention, and nutrient availability). This research will enable Dr. Sistani and Dr. Gebremedhin to explore the links between tillage and use of biochar and manure (as soil amendments), particularly the ways in which tillage impact how the long-term use of biochar increases soil organic carbon (SOC) and soil C storage. In the long term, such understanding will provide new insights to farmers to make informed decisions as to how to adopt and incorporate adaptive soil conservation strategies that enhance both soil quality and crop yield.

Under no-till soil management, corn seeds are planted below the soil surface (under any per-existing crop residue) using a no-till planter. For this study, a lightweight tractor equipped with a double-disk colter will be used to slice the surface soil and place seeds into the seedbed. To ensure good seed-to-soil contact, wheels mounted at the rear of the tractor press the soil back into place after seeding. Every year a mix of cover crop grass species and legumes will be planted following the corn harvest.

Since 2015, the 1890 Faculty Research Sabbatical Program (FRSP) provides faculty at 1890 land-grant universities (LGUs) with the opportunity to participate in a residency at an ARS laboratory to conduct cooperative research of mutual interest with ARS scientists. Tenure-track and research-track faculty, who have been employed for a minimum of three years at their current 1890 LGU, are eligible to participate in the program. To learn more about other programs available to 1890 LGUs, please visit the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture website: <https://www.ars.usda.gov/research/1890-faculty-research-sabbatical-program/>

National Germplasm System's Special Achievement Award Recipient

Submitted by: Christopher Sacchetti

Ms. Lisa Pfiffner, a Biological Science Research Technician located in Ames, Iowa at the North Central Regional Plant Introduction Station (NCRPIS) was recently awarded the 2020 USDA,ARS National Plant Germplasm System's (NPGS) Special Achievement Award. There are 20 sites in the U.S., including the one in Ames that develop, maintain, investigate and distribute collections of crop plants and their wild relatives and associated information. Ms. Pfiffner's award recognizes her exceptional contributions in the areas of seed quality assessment, protocol development, and her partnership with the curators and development team members responsible for the GRIN-Global System, the NPGS database that provides access to information associated with all of the NPGS.

In Ames, Lisa oversees all viability testing for the more than 54,000 unique 'accessions' of maize, oilseeds, vegetables, pseudo cereals, leafy greens and herbs, and woody or herbaceous ornamental plants, an awesome responsibility. Lisa works with the Station's six curators to improve viability testing methods and develop new protocols; an example would be their work to develop a protocol to distinguish dormant from dead seed of *Actea*, a medicinal plant.

A goal is to test about 10% of the collection each year, so that, on average, most accessions will have germination testing at ten-year intervals. Knowing which taxa need special testing methods or different testing intervals is important to provide meaningful results and solid information on collection quality.

Seed quality, genetic integrity, and storage conditions are extremely important to a gene bank's ability to maintain seed viability over long periods of time and to provide high quality seeds to researchers. Capturing associated information such as plant or seed traits of interest, flowering and maturity seed traits, characteristics is important as well.

Lisa started as an Iowa State University student employee, working with the staff that curates the collection of maize inbreds, populations, and teosinte (a wild ancestor of maize). Following graduation from ISU, the maize group was delighted for the opportunity to hire Lisa as a permanent ARS Technician. In this position she gained experience with the efforts that go into propagating seed – growing plants, controlling their pollination, post-harvest management prior to storing seed, all the factors that impact seed quality, and corresponding workflows. Within the station, Lisa transferred to the seed storage lab's group, where she stored seed, filled orders, and became familiar with all of the crops at the station, and the stakeholder groups that request them for their research.

Lisa pursued further studies and received her certification for Purity testing from the Association of Official Seed Analysts (AOSA) in 2013. She became the germination coordinator in 2014 and received her AOSA certification in Germination testing that same year. Currently, she manages a staff of ISU student employees involved in germination testing, plant propagation, and data capture. Her duties include coordinating viability sampling with the seed analysts and curator at the National Laboratory for Genetic Resources Preservation in Ft. Collins, Colorado, and participating in all relevant activities AOSA.

From Lisa, "I have always loved nature and being outside so NCRPIS was a great fit for me from the start. Being able to focus on and study seeds and seed germination has been a real interest to me. I love the challenge of trying to get species to germinate that we have not really had much success with before.

I try to share that enthusiasm with the students that work with me. Some come to this job with little knowledge of plant biology, so I encourage questions and learning about the material that we are working with.

I also share my knowledge and enthusiasm with groups that are visiting the station and with my colleagues at The Nation Resource for Genetic Preservation (NCGRP) and the AOSA community.

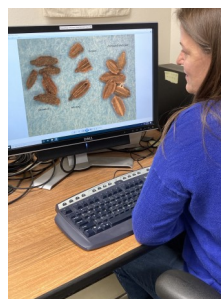
I work with all the teams here at the station and enjoy that interaction very much. I am always learning new things about the crops that they are working on and how what happens in the field has an impact on the seed that goes into the jar.



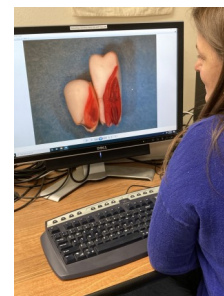
Lisa with container of germinating corn seedlings taken from the growth chamber.



Examining a tiny seed of Amaranthus under the microscope.



Capturing germination data counts.



Lisa with image of a TZ test.

This edition of the Medley contains additional content to celebrate previous Special Observance months from 2020. The following pages are a compilation of profiles highlighting employees of the MWA. USDA-ARS values Hispanic-American employees and culture (National Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 - October 15) and honors and celebrates veterans who have served this great nation, not only on Veteran's Day (November 11) but throughout the calendar year.

Meet Jose Ramirez, Peoria, Illinois



What is your occupation with USDA-ARS?

I am a Research Entomologist in the Crop Bioprotection Program, MWA. My work focuses on the identification of bacteria and fungi that naturally kill mosquitoes in the wild. The main objective is to develop environmentally-friendly alternatives to pesticides to control mosquitoes and the pathogens they transmit.

What are your cultural traditions?

There are several traditions that reflect the melting pot of cultures that make up Latin America. Something embedded in our daily lives involve cooking and eating fresh meals, especially with family and friends, participating in family celebrations and community festivities. Some traditions are proper of each region. For instance, in Peru, where I am from, certain traditions are typical of each geographical region: the Coast, the Andes and the Rainforest. We have many religious festivities and ceremonies that have been celebrated since the Incan and colonial times.

How do these cultural traditions link to the modern day?

Although many of these traditions date back to the Incan and colonial times, they are still practiced by Hispanics and people from my country. They are part of who we are.

What are your Hispanic traditions?

Following my Hispanic traditions, I am family-oriented and I always think of the wellbeing of my community. I like to cook and enjoy sharing typical Peruvian food with my friends. Cultural traditions and celebrations are very important and enriching to me.

What is your family history and lineage?

My Family has a diverse background: Spanish, native Peruvian, and African. As most Peruvians, we are *mestizos*, and this is the reason why our cultural traditions, food, music, and daily-life practices are very diverse.

What are the most important cultural values for you and those closest to you?

Family and friends are important for us, and mutual support is vital for our wellbeing and progress. Likewise, mutual respect and trust are very important, and we practice those values individually and as a group. We have a lot of respect for the elderly; we believe they have a lot to teach to the younger generations. We believe in the importance of being a good person, and doing good to others.

What would you like the USDA-ARS workforce to take away from celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month and learning about the familial history and lineage of Hispanic Americans who work for USDA-ARS?

Although Hispanics share a common official language, Spanish, and similar cultural traditions, each nationality from Latin America has extensive cultural richness that differs from one country to another; and even within one country, there are certain cultural differences from one city to the next. Many of these cultural traditions often define our work and our interaction with others. By making the population aware of such differences in cultural richness and diversity within the Hispanic population we strengthen our understanding of other cultures and traditions in the world.

What messages, traditions, and values do you hope to pass down to the next Hispanic American generation?

I hope to pass the importance of helping others and the concept that everyone has the ability to make a change in this world, that the collective wellbeing is as important as the individual. Also, one of the most important messages is the importance of being surrounded by family and friends, to respect and to listen to the elderly because their vast experience and knowledge can be of benefit to the younger generation. I would also pass the importance of taking good care of our environment, of the land and its resources because without them we would not be able to have a healthy existence.



Have you met some of the Veterans in the MWA?

Sherry Egbert, Administrative Officer, West Lafayette, Indiana

What does Veterans Day mean to you?

To me Veterans Day is a day that the nation says Thank You to all who have served. It is about recognizing the difference between military and civilian life and the sacrifices that come with military life. Beyond the obvious sacrifice of putting your life at risk on the front lines. It is about being thanked for the sacrifice of being deployed for weeks or months, sometimes with little to no notice. The sacrifice of having to live miles from extended family, being forced to move frequently and often not to a location of choice, kids changing schools over and over again, spouses compromise their careers, and the many missed life-events (first tooth falling out, school activities, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.). Veterans Day is the day when the nation says thank you for **volunteering** to join...to serve our Nation.

What motivated you to join the military?

Growing up in a small town (Moosup, CT) there were not many opportunities for me after high school. The military offered me a chance to travel and pay for my education.

How did you tell your family and friends that you were joining the military? Are there any conversations that stand out from that time?

I attempted to join immediately after graduating from high school. However, I was only 17 and I needed parental consent from both parents. My mother agreed but unfortunately my father did not. Needless to say, there were many spirited conversations. I left for basic training two weeks after my 18th birthday.

What was your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)?

It started as a 732X0 then changed to a 3S0X1 but both are Human Resources.

Where did you spend your military career in service to the nation?

I was lucky enough to spend more than half of my career in Europe. My first permanent duty station after training was in Wichita Falls TX, then Ankara Turkey, back to Wichita Falls TX, Aviano Italy, Ramstein Germany and ended in Cheyenne, WY. These were just my permanent duty locations and does not include the numerous deployments throughout my career.

How did you stay in touch with family and/or friends back home?

Serving before the digital age and social media was a challenge. We relied a lot on cards, letters and long plane trips.

How did (does) your military service affect and impact your life today?

I think my time in the service has given me a greater appreciation for those who continue to serve. The choice to voluntarily join any branch of the military during times of war or when the economy is booming speaks volumes as to the character and selflessness of those enlisting today. On a personal level, I think the greatest impact the military service had on my life today is to appreciate the time I get to spend with family.

Scott Anderson, Director of the Area Administrative Office, Peoria, Illinois

What does Veterans Day mean to you?

Veteran's Day is a day to acknowledge the sacrifices the men and women in our military have made to ensure our country is safe and free.

What motivated you to join the military?

Opportunity. The military was a way to attend college and to find a different path in life.

How did you choose your branch of military service?

I chose the Army for the opportunity to serve and based on the great history of this branch of service, which predates the forming of the United States of America. Additionally, the benefits they provided, including the Army College Fund and GI Bill were great secondary motivators.

How did you stay in touch with family and/or friends back home?

Of all the changes I saw technology make during my career, this was the greatest personal benefit. When I joined the Army, you communicated either by mail or telephone. By the end of my service, we had cell phones, skype and other means to stay in touch with family and friends more frequently, more quickly and less costly.

How did (does) your military service affect and impact your life today?

The Army helped shape me into the person I am today. I am grateful for the privilege and opportunity to serve our great nation.

David LaMar, Maintenance Mechanic Helper, Madison, Wisconsin



I am originally from Poteau, Oklahoma, but graduated high school in Panama, Oklahoma. Prior to high school ending, I enlisted for six years (August 1987 – 1993) in the United States Marine Corps and was Honorably discharged. It wasn't long after I finished my time in the Marines that I started missing military service, so I enlisted in the Army Reserves in January 1994 and spent 4 ½ years as a reservist before joining the active duty ranks of the U.S. Army in September 1998. After serving 7 ½ years in Army, including one deployment, parental obligations kept me from furthering my career, but I have no regrets. Since leaving active duty in 2006, I've lived in multiple states including: California, Texas, Tennessee, and now Illinois.



What does Veterans Day mean to you?

I feel that Veteran's Day represents a day to honor our military, past and present, for the sacrifices made on and off the battlefield. It is a challenge to families every time the military representative leaves to fulfill their duties.

What motivated you to join the military?

Many members of my family had been military, and I remember the pride they took in wearing the uniform. Additionally, the Marine Corps commercial, that I watched as a child, which showcased the Harrier Jet was inspiring.

When did you enlist?

I enlisted with the Marine Corps on November 06, 1986 and graduated their bootcamp on November 06, 1987.

How did you choose your branch of military service?

The family members that I was close to had been prior Army and Air Force. Besides loving the thought of seeing the Harrier Jet, I wanted to be the first Marine, and I was.

What was your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)?

During my Active Duty tour with the Marine Corps, I was an 1161 Refrigeration Mechanic, I also held additional duties as a supply technician. When I eventually served on Active Duty for the Army, my MOS was 52D Power Generation Equipment Repairer.

Where did you spend your military career in service to the nation?

For the Marine Corps I served in Iwakuni, Japan and was sent from there to Yechon, South Korea for Team Spirit 1988 for six months. I served in 29 Palms and El Toro, California. For the Army, I served in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Camp Stanley, South Korea, and Fort Irwin, California.

How did (does) your military service affect and impact your life today?

I feel that my military service contributed to my "can-do" attitude. I will normally exhaust all efforts to accomplish a task.

Deborah Melendez, Human Resources Liaison, Peoria, Illinois



What does Veterans Day mean to you?

It is a day I reflect on my time in the service and all the missions I was a part of as well as how the military changed my life. I served 9 years and made a lot of friends that are more like extended family. I typically talk to them on that day and catch up with them.

What motivated you to join the military?

I wanted to do something different. The benefits (schooling) were amazing and I thought it would be a way to see the world in ways I wouldn't do otherwise and all while being a part of something bigger than myself.



How did you tell your family and friends that you were joining the military? Are there any conversations that stand out from that time?

The one thing that stands out was my conversation with my adopted mother. She was really against me joining and that made me sad. Looking back though she was just nervous for me. They are proud of me but weren't ready to let me go. I was ready for the change, but it didn't make it easy to leave home and leave your family.

When were you drafted or when did you enlist?

I enlisted when I was 18. I had my 19th birthday 2 days into basic training.

How did you choose your branch of military service?

I had two uncles by marriage that were in the Navy but no one in my family that I know of had ever served. I talked to them about the Navy and just knew that wasn't for me. I also felt that Army and Marines were more hands on then I wanted to be. I truly felt that the Air Force was the perfect fit and it really was.

What medals and citations are you most proud to have earned during your career?

While stationed in Biloxi for 9 months of training Hurricane Katrina came through and destroyed the area. We had to stay there for a couple weeks while they figured out what to do with all of us. The devastation was so unreal and a sight I won't ever forget. During the time we were there we helped with clean up. We had no power and there was so much uncertainty, the only meals we had during that time were good ole MRE's. I ended up receiving the Humanitarian Medal for my service with cleaning up the area. After a few weeks they decided we would all go to another base (temporarily). Right before we left, I was coined by a MSgt. Being 'coined' is a big deal and it was my first after the Airman's coin that everyone got at basic training.

Ryan Kilgore, Biological Science Lab Technician, West Lafayette, Indiana

What does Veterans Day mean to you?

It's a day to commiserate with my brothers and sisters in arms. I specifically take time to see friends that I served with in Iraq.

What motivated you to join the military?

Youthful ignorance and that sweet pension. It was also an opportunity as an out of shape nerdy kid to prove myself.

When were you drafted or when did you enlist?

I enlisted in the Army Reserve in 1999 while I was still in high school.

How did you choose your branch of military service?

My mom's 3rd and 4th husbands were in the Army, so I was biased toward that branch.

What was your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)?

I have 3 MOSs, I started with 92Y (Unit Supply), then 52C (now called 91C, Utilities Repair) and finally 38B (Civil Affairs).

Where did you spend your military career in service to the nation?

I've been in the Army Reserve and Indiana Army National Guard my entire career. I have been to Iraq twice and Kuwait once. I have done training in Indiana, California, Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan.

How did you stay in touch with family and/or friends back home?

In Iraq in 2003, I waited in line to use a DSN phone. I would dial dozens of times to try to get an operator in the US to connect me to my fiancé (now wife). Waiting in line plus time to connect would take hours and I would get 20 minutes if she answered the phone. The lag was terrible, and the connection was hard to hear. In 2018, in Kuwait, I had a cell phone and used WhatsApp to video call my wife and kids with nearly no lag or video quality issues.

What medals and citations are you most proud to have earned during your career?

My article 15 for losing my temper at a higher-ranking NCO.

How did (does) your military service affect and impact your life today?

The GI bill made it possible for me to attend college. Between my first and second deployments to Iraq, I worked in a factory. While on the second deployment, I decided to go to school. That opportunity has given me a much more satisfying career.

Eric Vance, Local IT Specialist, West Lafayette, Indiana

What does Veterans Day mean to you?

A time to reflect on the history of our nation, the conflicts we have overcome, and the lives that our current society has cost the country and families that support it.

What motivated you to join the military?

Financial necessity and the opportunities and personal development I have seen my friends and family gain from service.

What motivated you to join the military?

I just told them that I decided to join. Most people didn't think I was a good fit with my stubborn streak and mean attitude. My father was very excited.

What do you remember about the day you were drafted or enlisted?

Not much. I was surprised by how soon I was scheduled to leave, but they paid a lot for that quick turnaround so it was worth it.

If you enlisted, what were some of the reasons that you joined the military?

As above, it was mostly financial. I had a lot of student debt and after a year of unfortunate employment twists my savings was mostly exhausted. I had a responsibility to my roommates and fiancé at the time and the stability and pay of the Army resolved all of those issues. I also really hoped to visit Germany or Italy but never got the chance.

How did you choose your branch of military service?

I don't like the water enough for most of the other branches and I have a lot of friends that had previously served. It just seemed to fit me. I didn't get the MOS I wanted as it was no longer entry level MOS, but I am glad I took the one I did.

What was your Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)?

25U Signal Support Systems Specialist

How did (does) your military service affect and impact your life today?

There is something to remind me every day. Beyond just the things that it changed in me, there are little things I learned throughout that seem unrelated, but were picked up in training that just make life simpler.

L. Rene Martinez, Hydrologic Technician, Columbus, Ohio



I began my career with the Department of Agriculture as a Biological Science Technician in the Crop Quality Fruit Insect Research Unit in Weslaco, Texas. I was transferred to Ohio in 2012 and am currently serving as a Hydrologic Technician in the Soil Drainage Research Unit in Columbus.

I am a native of the Rio Grande Valley in deep south Texas. After graduating from High School, I realized that if I were going to continue my education, I needed a way to pay for it. Enlisting in the U.S. Air Force was a way of learning new skills and gaining experience while still working towards my goal of a college education. Little did I know that I was about to embark on the most eclectic period of my life.

My “job” in the Air Force was as a Bomber Aircraft Airframe and Powerplant Maintenance Crew Chief. After much training, I was stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane Washington and assigned a B-52 aircraft. I was promoted to Sargent “below the Zone” (earlier then prescribed) and achieved a proficiency level of Master Crew Chief.

I was fortunate to work with a superb crew and was invited to participate in the Air Force Red Flag competition. Red Flag is the U.S. Air Force's premier air-to-air combat training exercise. My crew and I were awarded the Air Force Achievement Medal for earning “Top Score” in 9 out of 11 categories. I also had the opportunity to experience many memorable temporary duty locations like Fairbanks, Alaska, Hawaii and Guam.

I of course, had the benefit of learning many technical skills from my time in the military. But along with that, I also learned much about life and people. We were a group of people from every corner of the country. Everyone brought with themselves different life experiences and skills. We managed to learn from each other, support each other and worked hard to accomplish our assignments. After a while, we were no longer “the guy from Texas” or New York, or California. We were Airmen from the 92nd Bomb Wing. We worked together, ate together, celebrated together, failed together, and succeeded together. Yes, it did feel like we were brothers and sisters, and there wasn't a thing that we wouldn't do for each other. So every Veterans Day I think of them and hope that they are doing well because even though the pay was low, the hours were long, and the work dangerous, it was that sense of sodality which always contributed to the satisfaction in a job well done.

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